

Cable
Text:

UNCLAS SENSITIVE NICOSIA 00855

SIPDIS

CXNICOSI:

ACTION: DCM EXEC

INFO: DAO RAO ECON POL

DISSEMINATION: EXEC

CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: AMB:RSCHLICHER

DRAFTED: POL:AMYIALLOUROU

CLEARED: DCM:JZIMMERMAN; POL:GMACRIS

VZCZCNCI026

RR RUEHC RUEHZL RUCNDT RUEHBS

DE RUEHNC #0855/01 2990927

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FM AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8267

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0981

RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NICOSIA 000855

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CY](#)

SUBJECT: ELECTIONS 2008: MECHANICS AND PROCESS

Reference: 06 Nicosia 1964

¶1. (U) Summary: Cypriots will go to the polls on February 17 to elect their president. With three strong candidates in the race, it is doubtful that one of them will tally the required 50 percent-plus-one to win outright, forcing a February 24 runoff. Historically, successful candidates have enjoyed first-round backing from either Communist AKEL or conservative DISY, each party commanding one-third of the electorate. This race is different, however, since both AKEL (for the first time ever) and DISY are sponsoring challengers against incumbent Tassos Papadopoulos. Polling results vary according to which party sponsored the count, but all show less than four points separating the leading and third-place candidates. End Summary.

How the Game is Played

¶2. (U) Presidential elections in Cyprus are held every five years. According to the 1960 Constitution, the President should be a Greek Cypriot elected directly by the Greek Cypriot community (the Constitution provides for the simultaneous election of a Turkish Cypriot Vice President, but the position has remained vacant since the onset of inter-communal clashes in 1963). The presidential candidate who receives more than fifty percent of the vote wins office. If none attains the requisite majority, a runoff election takes place the following week between the two top vote-getters. Next year's elections are scheduled for February 17 and 24, with the presidential investiture slated for February 29.

¶3. (U) Voting is mandatory for all eligible Greek Cypriots over 18 (Turkish Cypriots residing in the government-controlled areas may also vote). Not registering in the electoral roll, or not voting without a valid reason is a criminal offense punishable by up to six months imprisonment and/or a fine of 200 Cyprus pounds (approximately USD 485). In practice, however, authorities do not

exercise these provisions. The projected number of voters in the February election is 520,000. Of those, some 27,000 are new voters between the ages of 18 and 30 who have so far failed to register. The Electoral Service of the Ministry of Interior has sent them letters informing them of their obligations, and all major parties are working to gain their support.

¶4. (U) On election day (always a Sunday), polling stations open at 07:00 and close at 17:00. Ballots are counted by hand and the president of the polling station transmits the results via e-mail to the central election service in Nicosia. The Election Service of the Ministry of Interior expects to have a reliable projection of the results by 19:30.

¶5. (U) By law, campaigning stops at midnight of the preceding Friday, and the publication of opinion polls is prohibited for the entire week before the election. Exit poll results can be announced immediately after the closing of polling stations, however.

Historical Background and Current Situation

¶6. (U) Next February's vote will mark the eleventh presidential election in the brief history of the Republic of Cyprus. Only five chief executives have governed since independence: Archbishop Makarios (1959-1977), DIKO leader Spyros Kyprianou (1977-1988), independent George Vassiliou (1988-1993), DISY leader Glafcos Clerides (1993-2003), and incumbent President Tassos Papadopoulos. Papadopoulos won office in via an alliance of his own party, DIKO, plus AKEL and socialist party EDEK.

¶7. (U) In the post-Makarios era, the support of one of the two major parties, AKEL or DISY, was a sine qua non for the success of a presidential candidate. The two parties, which represent approximately one-third of the electorate each, possess strong mechanisms which enable them to rally the support of the bulk of their followers at every election. However, the strong public and media support for incumbent Papadopoulos' Cyprus problem policy presents a difficulty that the two parties never have had to confront before. Surveys conducted in September and October show Papadopoulos continuing to hold a slim lead over challengers Dimitris Christofias (AKEL) and Ioannis Kasoulides (DISY), with roughly four percentage points separating them.

¶8. (U) Papadopoulos is supported by a coalition incorporating DIKO, EDEK, the European Party (EUROKO), as well as a few other smaller political groups and organizations united in their opposition to the 2004 Annan Plan and similar, "unfair" Cyprus reunification efforts. Based on the May 2006 parliamentary election results, the coalition's combined electoral strength amounts to one-third of the electorate, roughly equaling the DISY and AKEL haul.

Comment

¶9. (SBU) Over the next four months, the presidential candidates will develop and promote platforms containing planks on the economy, crime, education, and other matters affecting day-to-day Cypriot life. And voters will ignore them. Two factors ultimately will determine who advances into the second round: "syspeirosy," best defined as a mixture of party cohesion and high turnout, and the individual candidate's success in convincing the electorate that he's most fit to manage the Cyprus Problem.

SCHLICHER